



**For Immediate Release**

**Date:** May 27, 2004

**Contacts:** Marieka Klawitter, Associate Professor  
University of Washington Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs  
(206) 616-1673, cell: (206) 850-7573, [marieka@u.washington.edu](mailto:marieka@u.washington.edu)

Greg Weeks, WorkFirst Study Director  
Washington State Employment Security  
(360) 438-4804, [gweeks@esd.wa.gov](mailto:gweeks@esd.wa.gov)

Kristin Alexander, WorkFirst Media Relations Coordinator  
(360) 902-9307, [kalexander@esd.wa.gov](mailto:kalexander@esd.wa.gov)

## **Study shows WorkFirst activities help families make transition from welfare to work**

OLYMPIA – Washington’s WorkFirst program continues to help families make the transition from welfare to work, according to the latest findings in a comprehensive study by university researchers and the state.

Washington state today released three new reports from the WorkFirst Study, a long-term research project by the University of Washington, Washington State University and the state to determine how thousands of families are faring under WorkFirst, Washington’s six-year-old welfare reform program.

Researchers looked at the effects of WorkFirst activities on employment and welfare recipients’ opinions about WorkFirst.

“The type of people receiving welfare and their experiences with WorkFirst have been remarkably consistent over the four years of the study,” said Marieka Klawitter, associate professor at the University of Washington’s Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs and head of the study analysis team. “Families are still participating in training and finding jobs, though it has been harder with the higher unemployment rates in recent years.”

Highlights from the reports include:

### **WorkFirst Activities and Employment**

- Parents who received welfare in 2001 and participated in WorkFirst activities, including Job Search activities and pre-employment training, were more likely to be employed and had higher wages than those who did not.

(more)

- The Community Jobs program, which provides short-term, subsidized work for the hardest-to-serve parents, was found to increase quarterly earnings by an average of \$463. WorkFirst's Job Search program was shown to increase pay by as much as \$287, and pre-employment training was shown to impact wages by an average of \$125.
- The average wage for families on assistance, including those not working, ranged from \$500-\$700 per quarter, while those who left welfare for work or other reasons earned higher wages, about \$2,000, during the same period.
- Results were compiled from more than 1,000 interviews with a sample group of adults drawn from the October 2001 welfare rolls.

### **Opinions about WorkFirst**

- About two-thirds of current and former welfare recipients said they believe Washington's WorkFirst program helps promote self-sufficiency.
- Sixty-nine percent had a positive impression of WorkFirst and two-thirds said their quality of life had improved during the year prior to the survey.
- WorkFirst activities including the Job Search program, case workers, Individual Responsibility Plans, support services, and the post-employment call center were found helpful by parents.
- Sixty-two percent of respondents offered suggestions for improving WorkFirst. The most common recommendation involved staff, including adding personnel, better training and more time to meet with staff. More individualized service and enhanced choices in jobs and training were also frequently mentioned.
- Results were compiled from more than 3,100 interviews with three sample groups of adults drawn from the welfare rolls in March 1999, October 2000 and October 2001.

### **Education and Training Background**

- Nearly half of welfare recipients surveyed dropped out of school, usually because of becoming a parent or lack of interest. However, nearly 60 percent of those later returned to complete a high school diploma or equivalent.
- About a quarter of welfare recipient surveyed never graduated from high school or earned a GED. However, another quarter had at least some college education.
- Results were compiled from more than 3,100 interviews with three sample groups of adults drawn from the welfare rolls in March 1999, October 2000 and October 2001.

Four years ago, researchers began interviewing a random sample of adults receiving welfare assistance. Each year, surveyors re-interview as many of the original participants as possible. New groups of participants are also interviewed. Responses from each group are compared and also combined to provide a broad picture.

Study reports and additional information about WorkFirst are available on the WorkFirst Web site at [www.workfirst.wa.gov](http://www.workfirst.wa.gov).

###